



## One year of vaccines: Many lives saved, many needlessly lost

By CARLA K. JOHNSON  
AP Medical Writer

One year ago, the biggest vaccination drive in American history began with a flush of excitement in an otherwise gloomy December. Trucks loaded with freezer-packed vials of a COVID-19 vaccine that had proved wildly successful in clinical trials fanned out across the land, bringing shots that many hoped would spell the end of the crisis.

That hasn't happened. A year later, too many Americans remain unvaccinated and too many are dying.

The nation's COVID-19 death toll stands at around 800,000 as the anniversary of the U.S. vaccine rollout arrives. A year ago it stood at 300,000. An untold number of lives, perhaps tens of thousands, have been saved by vaccination. But what might have been a time to celebrate a scientific achievement is fraught with discord and mourning.

National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins said scientists and health officials may have underestimated how the spread of misinformation could hobble the "astounding achievement" of the vaccines.

"Deaths continue ... most of them unvaccinated, most of the unvaccinated because somebody somewhere fed them information that was categorically wrong and dangerous," Collins said.



Sandra Lindsay, left, a nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, is inoculated with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine by Dr. Michelle Chester, in the Queens borough of New York, on Dec. 14, 2020. Lindsay was the first person in the country to get a COVID-19 vaccine shot.

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## One year of vaccines: Many lives saved, many needlessly lost



People hold signs as several hundred anti-mandate demonstrators rally outside the Capitol during a special legislative session considering bills targeting COVID-19 vaccine mandates, Nov. 16, 2021, in Tallahassee, Fla.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

Developed and rolled out at blistering speed, the vaccines have proved incredibly safe and highly effective at preventing deaths and hospitalizations. Unvaccinated people have a 14 times higher risk of dying compared to fully vaccinated people, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated based on available data from September.

Their effectiveness has held up for the most part, allowing schools to reopen, restaurants to welcome diners and families to gather for the holidays. At last count, 95% of Americans 65 and older had had at least one shot.

"In terms of scientific, public health and logistical achievements, this is in the same category as putting a man on the moon," said Dr. David Dowdy, an infectious-disease epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The vaccines' first year has been rocky with the disappointment of breakthrough infections, the political strife over mandates and, now,

worries about whether the mutant omicron will evade protection.

Despite all that, Dowdy said, "we're going to look back and say the vaccines were a huge success story." On the very day that an eager nation began rolling up its sleeves, Dec. 14, 2020, the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 300,000. And deaths were running at an average of more than 2,500 a day and rising fast, worse than what the country witnessed during the harrowing spring of 2020, when New York City was the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak.

By late February total U.S. deaths had crossed 500,000, but the daily death count was plummeting from the horrible heights of early January. With hopes rising in early March, some states began reopening, lifting mask mandates and limits on indoor dining. Former President Donald Trump assured his supporters during a Fox News interview that the vaccine was safe and urged them to get it.

But by June, with the threat from COVID-19 seemingly fading, demand for vac-

cines had slipped and states and companies had turned to incentives to try to restore interest in vaccination.

It was too little, too late. Delta, a highly contagious mutated form of coronavirus, had silently arrived and had begun to spread quickly, finding plenty of unvaccinated victims.

"You have to be almost perfect almost all the time to beat this virus," said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California, Irvine. "The vaccine alone is not causing the pandemic to crash back to Earth."

One of the great missed opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic is the shunning of vaccination by many Americans.

This fall, Rachel McKibbens, 45, lost her father and brother to COVID-19. Both had refused the protection of vaccination because they believed false conspiracy theories that the shots contained poison.

"What an embarrassment of a tragedy," McKibbens said. "It didn't have to be this way."

More than 228,500 Americans have died from COVID-19 since April 19, the date when all U.S. adults were eligible to be vaccinated. That's about 29% of the count since the first U.S. coronavirus deaths were recorded in February 2020, according to an Associated Press analysis.

In all, two states — Florida and Texas — contributed more than 52,000 deaths since that date. Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon, Wyoming and Idaho also saw outside death tolls after mid-April. Red states were more likely than blue states to have greater than average death tolls since then.

"I see the U.S. as being in

camp," Noymer said. "The vaccines have become a litmus test for trust in government."

Wyoming and West Virginia, the states with the highest vote percentages for Donald Trump in 2016, have recorded about 50% of their total COVID-19 deaths since all adults were declared eligible for the vaccine in those states. In Oklahoma, nearly 60% of COVID-19 deaths occurred after all adults were vaccine-eligible.

There are exceptions: Notably, Hawaii and Oregon are the only Joe Biden-supporting states where more than half of the COVID-19 deaths came after shots were thrown open to all adults. North Dakota and South Dakota — both ardent Trump states — have kept their share of deaths after the vaccine became available across the board to under 25%.

California has seen more than 15,000 COVID-19 deaths since the state opened eligibility to all adults in mid-April. McKibbens' father and brother died in Santa Ana, California, in their shared home. McKibbens pieced together what happened from text messages on her brother's phone.

Some of the texts she read after his death, including back-and-forth messages with a cousin who cited TikTok as the source of bad advice.

"My brother did not seek medical attention for my dad," keeping him lying on his back, even as his breathing began to sound like a broken-down motor, said McKibbens, who lives across the country in Rochester, New York.

Her father, Pete Camacho, died Oct. 22 at age 67. McKibbens flew to Califor-

nia to help with arrangements. Her brother was sick, too, but "he refused to let me into the house because he said I shed coronavirus because I was vaccinated," McKibbens recalled. "It was a strange new belief I had never heard before." A friend found her brother's body after noticing food deliveries untouched on the porch. Peter Camacho, named for his father, died Nov. 8 at age 44.

"For me to have lost two-thirds of my family, it just levels you," McKibbens said. Important advice came too late for some. Seven months pregnant and unvaccinated, Tamara Alves Rodriguez tested positive for the coronavirus Aug. 9. Two days later, with many pregnant women falling seriously ill, U.S. health officials strengthened their guidance to urge all mothers-to-be to get vaccinated. Rodriguez had tried to get vaccinated weeks earlier but was told at a pharmacy she needed authorization from her doctor. "She never returned," said her sister, Tanya Alves of Weston, Florida.

Six days after testing positive, Rodriguez had to have a breathing tube inserted down her throat at a hospital near her home in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her baby girl was delivered by emergency cesarean section Aug. 16.

The young mother never held her child. Rodriguez died Oct. 30 at age 24. She left behind her husband, two other children and an extended family.

She urges others to get vaccinated: "If you would know the terror of being hospitalized or having a loved one there ... if people would know, they would be afraid of this instead of fearing the vaccine." □



# Harris unveils plan for electric vehicle charging network

By MATTHEW DALY

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The Biden administration released an ambitious federal strategy Monday to build 500,000 charging stations for electric vehicles across the country and bring down the cost of electric cars with the goal of transforming the U.S. auto industry.

"The future of transportation in our nation and around the world is electric," Vice President Kamala Harris said at an EV charging facility in suburban Maryland.

The \$1 trillion infrastructure law President Joe Biden signed last month authorizes a nationwide network of charging stations and sets aside \$5 billion for states to build them, including \$63 million for Maryland. The law also provides an additional \$2.5 billion for local grants to support charging stations in rural areas and in disadvantaged communities.

Biden's \$2 trillion social and environmental policy bill, now pending in the Senate, includes a \$7,500 tax credit to lower the cost of electric vehicles.

The Biden administration wants "to make electric vehicles accessible for everyone," Harris said. "Absolutely make it accessible for everyone and easy. Just like filling up your car with gas."

Harris visited a maintenance facility in Brandywine, just outside Washington, where she received a demonstration of how chargers work and learned about a plan to electrify the government fleet in Maryland's Prince George's County.

"There's no sound or fume!" Harris exclaimed as a local



**Vice President Kamala Harris speaks next to an electric vehicle and a charging station during her tour of the Brandywine Maintenance Facility in Prince George's County, Md., highlighting the electric vehicle investments in the bipartisan infrastructure law and the "Build Back Better Act" Monday, Dec. 13, 2021.**

worker demonstrated the charger. "How do I know it's actually working?"

The car is fully charged when it's blinking green, the worker told her.

The new EV charging strategy establishes a joint electric vehicles office between the federal Energy and Transportation departments; issues guidance and standards for states; and ensures consultations with manufacturers, state and local governments, environmental justice and civil rights groups, tribes and others, the White House said.

The two departments also will launch an advisory committee on electric vehicles that officials hope will be up and running early next year.

Accelerated adoption of electric vehicles for personal cars and commercial fleets would help achieve Biden's goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emission by 2050 while creating thousands of jobs, the White House said.

The effort also is intended to help the U.S. leapfrog China in the plug-in EV market.

Currently, the U.S. market share of plug-in electric ve-

hicle sales is one-third the size of the Chinese EV market.

Biden has set a goal that electric cars and trucks account for half of new vehi-

cles sold by 2030.

The LMC Automotive consulting firm expects U.S. sales of new fully electric vehicles to hit nearly 400,000 this year, almost double last

year's figure. EVs still make up only about 2.6% of sales, but the firm expects sales to grow to more than 730,000 next year and more than 2 million by 2025.

Even at 2 million, EV sales still would be only about 12% of U.S. new vehicle sales.

Republicans, including some who voted in favor of the new infrastructure law, have criticized Biden for being preoccupied with electric vehicle technology when Americans are contending with a spike in gasoline and natural gas prices.

Biden last month ordered a record 50 million barrels of oil released from America's strategic reserve, in coordination with other major energy consuming nations. Gas prices have fallen in recent weeks as fears grow of another possible economic slowdown from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Average prices on Sunday were \$3.33 per gallon, according to the American Automobile Association, down about 7 cents from late last month. □

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# Navy: sailor accused of igniting warship was 'disgruntled'

By JULIE WATSON

Associated Press

**SAN DIEGO (AP)** — Navy prosecutors alleged Monday that a sailor charged with setting the fire that destroyed the USS Bonhomme Richard last year was "disgruntled" after dropping out of Navy SEAL training, while his defense lawyers criticized the preliminary hearing as unfair.

Prosecutor Cmdr. Rich Federico told the court that text messages show Seaman Apprentice Ryan Sawyer Mays lied about his SEAL training to family and friends and was angry about being reassigned to the Bonhomme Richard. They also said he used foul language with officers days before the blaze.

Mays denied igniting the amphibious assault ship that burned for nearly five days and injured dozens aboard. His lawyers told the court that the government did not properly share the information it had gathered against him.

The defense lawyers said the Navy only recently had handed over 28,000 pages of material and hours of videos that were impossible to review before Monday's hearing. The junior



In this July 12, 2020, file photo, smoke rises from the USS Bonhomme Richard after an explosion and fire on board the ship at Naval Base San Diego.

sailor was charged with aggravated arson and the willful hazarding of a vessel a fire that was the worst non-combat Navy warship blaze in recent memory.

The hearing will determine whether there is enough evidence to proceed with a military trial.

About 160 sailors and officers were on board when the fire started July 12, 2020, in the lower storage area of the 840-foot

(256-meter) vessel, which had been docked at Naval Base San Diego while undergoing a two-year, \$250 million upgrade. More than 60 sailors and civilians were treated for minor injuries, heat exhaustion and smoke inhalation. Left with extensive structural, electrical and mechanical damage, the billion-dollar ship was scrapped.

Mays was assigned to the ship after dropping out of

training to become a Navy SEAL. He was described by some fellow sailors as a person with disdain for the Navy, according to investigators. May has maintained his innocence and noted to investigators that he helped fight the blaze, which sent acrid smoke wafting over San Diego for five days. Officials assessing the ship's damage found three of four fire stations on the ship had evidence of

tampering: Fire hoses had been disconnected and one was cut, according to court documents.

Investigators also found uncapped bottles containing small amounts of highly flammable liquid near the ignition site, including one that tested positive for a heavy petroleum distillate such as diesel, kerosene or jet fuel, according to the documents.

Mays told investigators he was in the hangar bay when he became aware of the fire, according to court documents. He described how he assisted firefighters, alerted at least one crew member of the threat and eventually helped fight the blaze, according to the documents.

Winds coming off San Diego Bay whipped up the flames that shot up the elevator shafts and exhaust stacks. Two explosions — one heard as far as 13 miles (21 kilometers) away — caused the fire to grow.

Dozens of Navy officials, including several admirals, face disciplinary action for systematic failures that investigators said prevented the blaze from being put out sooner, according to investigators. □

Associated Press



Ethan Crumbley appears on video from the Oakland County Jail at 52nd District Court in Rochester Hills, Mich., Monday, Dec. 13, 2021.

Associated Press

By COREY WILLIAMS and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER

Associated Press

**ROCHESTER HILLS, Mich. (AP)** — A Michigan judge declined Monday to move the 15-year-old charged with killing four students at Oxford High School out of an adult jail, but she

agreed that the jail needs to ensure the boy can't hear or see grown-up inmates. Ethan Crumbley's attorney, Paulette Loftin, argued during his probable cause conference in Rochester Hills District Court that her client should be moved back to a juve-

## Boy charged in Michigan school deaths to stay in adult jail

nile facility, saying that he "should not be considered a menace to other juveniles."

"This is someone who has never been in trouble before," Loftin said. "This is not someone who has a history of assaulting kids his age or any other negative contact with his peers. This one isolated incident is all that we're looking at here today."

But District Judge Nancy Carniak sided with Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Marc Keast, who countered that the nature of the charges and security risks mandate that Crumbley be held in an adult facility. Crumbley is charged as an adult with

killing four classmates and injuring seven other people in the Nov. 30 shooting at Oxford High School, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of Detroit.

"This cannot be compared to any other case that this court or any other court in this county has seen before, and calling this an isolated incident quite frankly does not do it justice," Keast said. "This was a mass murder at a school, judge. This was planned. It was pre-meditated. The defendant didn't just attack other individuals, he targeted juveniles."

Keast said he would contact the jail after Monday's hearing and "make sure that the defendant is nei-

ther within sight nor sound of any adult at the jail."

Carniak adjourned the probable cause hearing to Jan. 7 to review witness statements and other evidence from prosecutors and investigators. At that time, she could make a decision on whether to order a competency exam for him if such an exam is requested by his attorneys. The morning of the shooting, school officials met with Ethan Crumbley and his parents at the school after a teacher found a drawing of a gun, a bullet and a person who appeared to have been shot, along with messages stating, "My life is useless" and "The world is dead." □



# Blinken competes with top Russian official in Indonesia

By **MATTHEW LEE**

**AP Diplomatic Writer**

**JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)**

— Fresh from delivering a stern new warning to Russia over Ukraine, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Indonesia on Monday to find a top aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin already in Jakarta for security talks.

Just a day after joining his Group of Seven foreign minister colleagues in issuing the blunt demand for Russia to step back from a military escalation near the Ukrainian border, Blinken began a 48-hour visit to Indonesia with his plane parking in the shadow of that of Putin's national security adviser Nikolay Patrushev. Patrushev is considered the third most senior official in Russia's government.

Shortly before Blinken landed, the Russian embassy in Jakarta announced Patrushev's visit, saying he would be in the Indonesian capital for the same two days as the top American diplomat. The timing means that Patrushev's meetings will coincide with a major speech Blinken plans to give Tuesday on the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy. There was no indication that the two men might meet in Jakarta. Nor was there any indication that either would acknowledge the other's presence in Indonesia, which is the headquarters of the Asso-



**U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, second right, is greeted by U.S. Ambassador Sung Kim, left, as he arrives at the international airport in Jakarta, Monday, Dec. 13, 2021.**

ciation of Southeast Asian Nations and a key regional security player. Indonesia's foreign ministry downplayed the dueling visits.

"The U.S. and Russia are two of Indonesia's good partners. Indonesia will continue to develop strategic trust with all countries, all Indonesia's partners," Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said. "This strategic trust is very important as the foundation for building mutually beneficial and respectful cooperation. And Indonesia has a very high commitment to contribute to creating a peaceful, stable and prosperous world." Blinken met Monday afternoon with Indonesian President Joko Widodo before a full slate of events on Tues-

day, including the speech. The Russian embassy said Patrushev's main interlocutor in Indonesia would be Law and Security Affairs Minister Mohammad Mahfud.

Blinken traveled to Jakarta from a Group of Seven foreign ministers meeting in Liverpool, England, at which he and his counterparts told Russia on Sunday to "de-escalate" its military buildup near the Ukrainian border.

The G-7 called on Russia to "de-escalate, pursue diplomatic channels, and abide by its international commitments on transparency of military activities," and praised Ukraine's "restraint." The ministers warned on a joint state-

ment that any "use of force to change borders is strictly prohibited under international law. Russia should be in no doubt that further military aggression against Ukraine would have massive consequences and severe cost in response."

The statement came after President Joe Biden spoke to Putin in a video call last week and said he had made clear that a Russian invasion of Ukraine would have "devastating" consequences for Russia's economy.

Moscow denies having any plans to attack Ukraine and accuses Kyiv of its own allegedly aggressive designs. Ahead of Blinken's current trip, which at eight days will be his longest overseas

journey since taking office, State Department officials had said they expected his focus to shift from challenges posed by Russia to those posed by China as he moved from the G7 meeting in Liverpool across the globe to Southeast Asia.

It was not immediately clear if Patrushev's presence on Indonesia would change that. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, Blinken is aiming to highlight the importance of ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, on which many of China's neighbors have accused Beijing of encroaching.

In his meeting with Widodo, Blinken "expressed support for Indonesia's leadership in the Indo-Pacific as the world's third-largest democracy and a strong proponent of the rules-based international order," the State Department said.

Blinken also plans to express deep U.S. concerns about developments in Myanmar, where a military junta took power shortly after the Biden administration took office.

Last week, a court in Myanmar convicted democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was ousted in a de facto coup in February, on two charges. The proceedings were widely criticized as a further effort by the country's military rulers to roll back the democratic gains of recent years. □

**Associated Press**

## Marathon talks to form next Dutch coalition near finish line

**THE HAGUE, Netherlands**

**(AP)** — The four parties negotiating to form the next ruling Dutch coalition plan to send a policy blueprint for the next term of government to lawmakers this week, marking another step toward the end of marathon talks that followed a March election. The two officials overseeing the talks announced Monday that they plan to send the plan, known as a coalition accord, to Parliament on Wednesday afternoon.

Lawmakers will then de-

bate the plan before the coalition formation process advances to the next stage selecting ministers to make up the next Cabinet.

The Netherlands' longest ever formation process was kicked off nearly nine months ago by March 17's general election that was won by incumbent prime minister Mark Rutte's People's Party for Freedom and Democracy.

If the talks produce a new coalition, Rutte is poised to begin a fourth term as prime minister after lead-

ing a caretaker administration since the election.

The four parties hammering out policies for the next government are the same four that made up the last Dutch coalition. That government, made up of Rutte's VVD, the centrist D66 and two Christian-based parties, resigned weeks ahead of the March election to take political responsibility for a scandal in which thousands of parents were plunged into debt after being wrongly identified as fraudsters by tax authorities. □



**In this file photo dated Friday, April 2, 2021, caretaker Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte leaves after surviving a no-confidence motion in parliament in The Hague, Netherlands.**

**Associated Press**



# Vatican official apologizes for taking down LGBTQ resource

By NICOLE WINFIELD

Associated Press

**ROME (AP)** — A Vatican official apologized to a leading Catholic LGBTQ advocacy group for having yanked a reference to it on the Vatican website, drawing immediate praise Monday from the group as an “historic” move to repair the painful rift between the Catholic hierarchy and the gay community.

The Vatican’s General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, which is organizing a two-year consultation of rank-and-file Catholics ahead of a 2023 meeting of bishops at the Vatican, restored the reference to New Ways Ministry on the website over the weekend. The Synod had originally included a reference to a webinar video made by New Ways Ministry, a U.S.-based organization that advocates for greater acceptance of gays in the Catholic Church, in its “Resources” page directing people to sources of information about the Synod. The video urged LGBTQ Catholics to participate in the consultation process, which aims to make the Catholic Church more welcoming, responsive to the



A rainbow shines over St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, on Jan. 31, 2021.

Associated Press

laity and less centralized. Other U.S. resources alongside it were the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the archdioceses of Boston and Newark.

But the New Ways Ministry reference was taken down earlier this month without explanation. Suspicion fell on the U.S. bishops conference, which is headed by conservatives who have long kept New Ways Ministry at arms' length. Catholic doctrine holds that gays

must be treated with dignity and respect but that homosexual activity is “intrinsically disordered.”

Reversing course, the Synod’s communications director, Thierry Bonaventura, restored the online reference and said he wanted to apologize “to all LGBT and to the members of New Ways Ministries for the pain caused” by taking down the video. He urged them to contribute their reflections on the consulta-

tion process.

“In walking together, sometimes one may fall, the important thing is to get back up with the help of the brothers and sisters,” he wrote in the Synod’s newsletter. Bonaventura confirmed the statement to The Associated Press on Monday. The apology drew immediate praise from New Ways Ministry, which warmly accepted what it called an “historic” acknowledgment from the

church of “the harm that such a slight would have caused LGBTQ people and the entire church.”

“Apologies are powerful in their ability to build bridges of reconciliation and justice,” said the group’s executive director, Francis DeBernardo. Praising Bonaventura by name, he said such actions “are an example of the amazing grace which can be brought to life when one practices honesty and humility, and is concerned about how one’s actions may harm other people.”

“Vatican officials rarely apologize, and they almost certainly have never apologized to LGBTQ people or an LGBTQ Catholic ministry,” he added in a statement.

The flip-flop on the reference to New Ways Ministry on the Synod website is indicative of the mixed messages the Holy See over the years, and Pope Francis himself, have sent about the Vatican’s position on gays and their place in the church.

Francis made international headlines in 2013 when he quipped “Who am I to judge?” about a purportedly gay priest. □

# Sudan security forces fire tear gas at anti-coup protesters

By SAMY MAGDY

Associated Press

**CAIRO (AP)** — Security forces fired tear gas Monday to disperse protesters in Sudan’s capital in the latest street demonstrations against the October military coup and subsequent deal that reinstated deposed Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

Thousands of people took to the streets in Khartoum and other Sudanese cities as part of relentless demonstrations that have engulfed the country since the military seized power on Oct. 25.

The coup upended a fragile planned transition to democratic rule more than two years after a popular uprising forced the removal of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist

government in April 2019. Hamdok was reinstated last month amid international pressure in a deal that calls for an independent technocratic Cabinet under mil-

itary oversight led by him. The agreement included the release of government officials and politicians detained since the coup.

The Nov. 21 deal, how-

ever, was rejected by the pro-democracy movement, which insists power be handed over to a civilian government to lead the transition. Their protests follow the slogan: “No negotiations, no compromise, no power-sharing” with the military.

Footage circulated on social media Monday purportedly showed demonstrators marching in different locations in Khartoum and its sister city Omdurman. One video showed thousands of protesters in Khartoum’s district of Bahri, many of them waving Sudanese flags.

Activist Nazim Sirag said security forces used tear gas to disperse people marching in a street near the presidential palace in Khartoum. Protesters were

seen in online videos throwing tear gas canisters back at forces.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The U.S. Embassy in Khartoum said in a tweet: “We stand with the Sudanese people as they seek freedom, peace, and justice in today’s demonstrations, and welcome their government’s commitment to protection of peaceful protesters.”

Monday’s protests were called by the Sudanese Professionals Association and the so-called Resistance Committees, which spearheaded the uprising against al-Bashir and then the military coup. The protests came a few days ahead of the third anniversary of the start of the uprising against al-Bashir. □



People protests against the October military coup and subsequent deal that reinstated Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in Khartoum, Sudan, Monday, Dec. 13, 2021.

Associated Press





## EXPLAINER: Gang negotiations sensitive topic in El Salvador

Associated Press

**MEXICO CITY (AP)** — Allegations from the United States government that President Nayib Bukele's administration negotiated with El Salvador's powerful street gangs touched a sensitive topic. Previous administrations in El Salvador both from the left and right have done so and paid a political price. Prosecutions of some former officials are ongoing for past pacts. The U.S. Treasury said an investigation had revealed that officials with Bukele's government offered financial benefits to the gangs, as well as perks to their imprisoned leaders like pros-

titutes and cellphones, in exchange for lowering the homicide rate and political support in this year's legislative elections. The U.S. government did not present evidence and Bukele has vehemently denied any deal with the gangs.

### WHY ARE GANGS A SENSITIVE TOPIC IN EL SALVADOR?

The street gangs, which originated in the United States and took root in El Salvador when gang members were deported, are a force in Salvadoran society. They control neighborhoods and swaths of territory. There is no reliable figure on how many mem-

ber the gangs have, but estimates are in the tens of thousands.

They extort businesses, move drugs, murder, recruit children and restrict the free movement of people. Much of their leadership is imprisoned, but continues to run the criminal enterprises.

"The problem of the gangs is like a cancer," said Carlos Carcach, the research coordinator at the Higher School of Economics and Business in San Salvador. "It is something so present in everything that occurs in the country that it is difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate it." □



El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele speaks to the press at Mexico's National Palace after meeting with the President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in Mexico City, March 12, 2019. Associated Press

## Extortionists target families of crash victims in Guatemala

By SONIA PÉREZ D.

Associated Press

**GUATEMALA CITY (AP)** — Guatemalan families awaiting word on the fate of relatives involved in a deadly migrant smuggling accident in southern Mexi-

co are now also living with the terror of extortionists telling them their loved ones have been kidnapped. In the vacuum of official information following Thursday's deadly crash that left 55 migrants dead, op-

portunists are demanding money from their families for information.

In its desperation, one Guatemalan family had published its phone number on social media hoping for information about their missing relative. On Monday, they shared with an AP reporter a screen capture showing a Mexican phone number demanding \$3,000 if they wanted to see him again.

The caller even sent what appeared to be an altered photo that superimposed the relative's face on the body of another migrant. The extortion is especially cruel because the families are distraught, poor and in most cases in debt for thousands of dollars for the failed smuggling attempt. □



An injured migrant woman is moved by rescue personnel from the site of an accident near Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas state, Mexico, Dec. 9, 2021.

Associated Press

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# An unforgettable dining experience awaits you at Tierra del Sol

**NOORD** — Imagine dining with a panoramic view surrounded by the golf's greens, the island's rugged north coast and the mesmerizing blue ocean in a relax dining experience, delighted in fresh cuisine with Caribbean, European and American flavors. Inspired by nature the restaurant is letting in the outside while the menu reflects what guests are looking for nowadays: variation, adults & younger diners choices, great prices with a friendly service. That is the great thing about the re-opened casually elegant restaurant at Tierra del Sol: it is for everyone and every occasion!

The Restaurant at Tierra del Sol transformed into a place of light, fresh looks, elegant though laid-back setting and the choice between inside and outside dining. Those two areas flow into each other in a natural way. Families with children dine on the big tables, some business people take a quick bite inside and a group of golfers enjoy a meal after their game. It is a fantastic concept that is accessible for all without losing its essence: great food in a stylish interior design overlooking the spectacular view.

**Lunch with unmatched views**  
Guests praise Tierra del Sol restaurant for



the magnificent views making it a popular lunch spot as well as a great after-golf lunch experience. Locals and visitors have been coming for years to Tierra del Sol to unwind and let go in this elegant yet laid-back setting. Savoring some handhelds delicacies such as Crispy Chicken Caesar Wrap, Fish or Steak Tacos or a Classic Burger are just a few to mention and for those Pizza and Pasta lover's they have a great selection of dishes as well.

## Divine Dining

Tune in for a culinary experience that will give dining another perspective. We are not talking about the standard 3-course menu, but about a journey through taste-land. The Restaurant at Tierra del Sol invites you to taste as many items as you wish from their extensive dining menu.

Fresh Oysters, Escargots, Flash seared Tuna Tataki, Beef Carpaccio, Cheese and Charcuterie Board or TDS Wedge Salad are only some of the welcoming dishes. For the main courses you can enjoy the Fresh Catch of the day, Caribbean Seafood, Filet Mignon, Lobster Thermidor, Korean Pork Chop, Vegan Bowl or Fettuccini Truffle Carbonara among others. Top it off with a sweet surrender of a caramel flan, New York Cheesecake or Chocolate Mousse are one of the choices.

The friendly staff is looking forward in welcoming you! Indulge into this culinary discovery at the most splendid scenery of our One Happy Island.□



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Article by Etnia Nativa

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Etnia Nativa is close to high rise Hotels



## Sargasso Sea Weed

Episode CXXXIV - 134

**NOORD** — Seaweed, or macro algae, refers to thousands of species of macroscopic, multicellular, marine algae. Seaweed species such as kelps provide essential nursery habitat for fisheries and other marine species and thus protect food sources; other species, such as planktonic algae, play a vital role in capturing carbon, producing at least 50% of Earth's oxygen.

Natural seaweed ecosystems are sometimes under threat from human activity. For example, mechanical dredging of kelp destroys the resource and dependent fisheries. Humans have a long history of cultivating seaweeds for their use. In recent years, seaweed farming has become a global agricultural practice, providing food, source material for various chemical uses, cattle feeds and fertilizers. Because of their importance in marine ecologies and for absorbing carbon dioxide, recent attention has been on cultivating seaweeds as a potential climate change mitigation strategy for bio sequestration of carbon dioxide, alongside other benefits like nutrient pollution reduction, increased habitat for coastal aquatic species, and reducing local ocean acidification. The Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate recommends "further research attention" as a mitigation tactic.

Sargasso a brown macro algae numerous throughout temperate and tropical oceans of the world, where they generally inhabit shallow water and coral reefs.



NASA satellites revealed the largest marine algae bloom in the world in 2018. A belt of Sargasso that contained over 22 million tons of seaweed stretched some 5,500 miles across the Atlantic to West Africa. Satellite images are showing abnormally high amounts again in 2021. Ten year data gathered has revealed the likely causes of these seaweed invasions: Global warming, dust clouds of the Saharan and the growing nitrogen footprint. Acts Just as nutrients feed red tide blooms; feeding the Sargasso, which thrives in warmer water.

Sargasso presents risks to human health as well. In the water, it's harmless to humans, but the trouble begins once it lands on the beach and starts to decompose. Breathing in these toxic fumes may cause, skin irritation, respiratory and neurocognitive symptoms

in people that come in close contact with the degrading Sargasso. Our West coast beaches also are covered with sea weed and marine grasses due to seasonal bigger waves that bumbles and loosen up the sea weed of the coral which finally lands on the coast. Public Works (DOW) usually did the clean-up work and native traditional farmers picked up the rest with which they fertilize their "cunuco", traditional "Caque-tian" agricultural land plots. □

**Did you say that you love Aruba its origins and cultural heritage? Than this private encounter with our columnist anthropologist is just as you. Sessions created in a gorgeous setting for visitor with special interests. Appointment is required. [etnianativa03@gmail.com](mailto:etnianativa03@gmail.com) or Whatsapp us 297 592 2702 for a private reservation.**

**Sargassum**

<p><b>Treads to</b></p> <p>Tourism</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Economy</p> <p>Marine life</p>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>Biogas</p> <p>Fertiliser</p> <p>Biosorbent</p> <p>Food products</p> <p>Pharmaceuticals</p>
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# Aruba to me is .... a yearly calming opportunity to refresh my dreams, goals, and friendships



**By Lyn Brubaker**  
**ORANJESTAD —** Aruba Today loves portraying its visitors. We love sharing their stories of what Aruba means to them. For today we received an amazing story from Lyn Brubaker from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who has been coming for almost 30 years to her beloved island. She wrote:

"My husband and I came to Aruba the first time in 1992...and have been coming every year at the beginning. We learned to scuba dive here in 2002. We have many happy memories of this beautiful island. Sadly, my husband, diagnosed with an aggressive pancreatic cancer in the summer of 2015, died less than 6 months later. As difficult as it has been, I have continued to return to Eagle Beach every year since his death (except COVID 2020). This was my 23rd return visit. I love the immersion into this beautiful island. On my way back home and waiting for my flight many memories started popping in my head of the many things I have seen and experienced during my 23 visits".

## Here are some highlights:

**Aruba Airport:** evolved from passengers exiting the airplane outside, down steps, walking outside in the sun/heat to be "processed" in the no air conditioning airport.

**Aruba's Natural Bridge landmark:** beautiful to visit, sadly collapsed; the harsh, barren, rough waters on the "other side" of the islands beautiful white sand beaches

**Donkeys:** roaming freely on the island, frequent encounters on our walks, now in a sanctuary on the island, beautiful Christmas cards I bought to support the sanctuary

**"Hot water":** Steam from desalination plant provided "hot water" in our hotel for showers, wait too long into the evening and there was no more hot water for bathing

**Aloe plants:** were "everywhere", along the road, amongst the scruff of cactus, Divi trees, along walking paths

**Bubali Bird Sanctuary:** taught us much history of bird migration on the island, climbing the steps to peer out over "the landscape", in-



stilled an awareness that respecting the Aruba environment is crucial to the island's sustainability

**Butterfly Farm:** I think we were two of some of the first visitors to see butterflies on the island, again, environmentally, butterflies support the sensitive Aruba ecological environment

**Time Share's:** "salespeople" walked the beaches (at least on Eagle Beach) enticing tourists to invest in a piece of property ownership for a lifetime of returns to "One Happy Island". Our first visit to Aruba in 1992, we stayed at the same hotel every year, Manchebo Beach Hotel on Eagle Beach. Eagle Beach remains as beautiful as ever, thankfully it remains a public beach for all Arubans to enjoy, as ... it is Arubans beach.

**Scuba Diving:** learned to scuba dive in Aruba from a local Aruban dive outfit (husband & wife business), exploring under the water's surface in Aruba reinforces the essential environmental balance between Aruba's gifts of nature

**Low Rise/High Rise:** in 1992, low rise hotels were established, high rise hotels were being built further up the island. Golf courses were "not a visible draw" for tourists...today golf seems to have taken priority over the natural landscape with unnatural manicured grass. Low rise hotels seem to offer an ambience of "sun, sand, Aruban's sensitivity to their culture". High rise hotels seem to offer "replicas" of glamor, activity, amenities that tourists expect albeit the lack of Aruban culture (obviously my opinion)

**Hurricane winds:** brought change to things we were familiar with, such as the storage buildings at the hotel for wind surfing boards, etc, only to be replaced by red tiles, plants, ornamental fixtures. I smile each visit to the hotel, as no one understands the history of those cement/tile covered areas in the sand

## Things that have NOT changed:

- sunshine, white sands, the breeze
- brief rain showers followed by sunshine
- beautiful sunset
- colorful rainbows
- swirling clouds
- pelicans, butterflies, hummingbirds
- clear blue waters, seashells
- drinking the most amazing water from the spigot

**One Happy Island:** YES!! After 29 years Aruba remains most definitely "One Happy Island" for me. To return, each visit for me has strengthened my friendships with staff who have become "seasonal" friends, deepened my respect for the island of Aruba, calmed the challenges that life has placed before me, renewed my belief that all people are truly good. And most important part of it all is that my husband spirit is "in the Aruban air". □



# Liz Weston: A year-end money checklist for people 50 and up

By **LIZ WESTON** of NerdWallet

Age brings unique opportunities and obligations, including some important year-end tasks that can help you make the most of your money. For people 50 and older, here are some to consider:

## PLAY CATCH-UP, IF YOU CAN

If you're still employed, use a retirement calculator to see if you should boost your savings rate.

Catch-up contributions could allow you to save more in tax-advantaged accounts. Someone who is 50 or older can contribute up to \$26,000 to a workplace 401(k) in 2021, and up to \$7,000 to an IRA, says Mark Luscombe, principal analyst for Wolters Kluwer Tax & Accounting.

You have until Dec. 31 to contribute to workplace plans for 2021 and until April 15 to make your 2021 IRA contributions. The ability to contribute to a Roth in 2021 phases out beginning at modified adjusted gross income of \$125,000 for singles and \$198,000 for married couples filing jointly.

Slightly different rules apply for health savings accounts, which are paired with qualifying high-deductible health insurance plans, Luscombe says. Contribution limits for 2021 are \$3,600 for people with individual coverage and \$7,200 for people with family coverage. People 55



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com.

Associated Press

and older can make an additional catch-up contribution of \$1,000. As with IRAs, you have until the tax filing deadline, April 15, to contribute for the year.

To contribute to an HSA, the account owner must have a qualifying health insurance plan with an annual deductible of at least \$1,400 for individual coverage and \$2,800 for fam-

ily coverage. People on Medicare cannot contribute to an HSA, but they can withdraw money tax-free from an HSA to pay medical expenses, including Medicare premiums, deductibles and copayments, Luscombe says.

## PLAN FOR REQUIRED MINIMUM DISTRIBUTIONS

Money can't stay in retirement accounts indefinitely,

says certified public accountant Mary Kay Foss, a member of the American Institute of CPAs' individual and self-employed tax committee. Withdrawals must begin at some point, typically age 72. If you miss a deadline or withdraw too little, you could face a tax penalty equal to 50% of the amount you should have withdrawn but didn't. Your retirement fund or brokerage can help you calculate the appropriate amount, or you can use the tables in IRS Publication 590-B. The IRS specifies the minimum you need to take each year based on your Dec. 31 account balance for the prior year. Your required minimum distribution for 2021, for example, will be based on your Dec. 31, 2020, balance.

You must typically take your distributions by the end of the year, although you can delay your first RMD until April 1 of the year after you turn 72. If you delay, you'll have to take your second RMD by the end of that year, Foss says.

You can put off RMDs from a workplace plan such as a 401(k) if you're still working for the company that sponsors the plan and you don't own 5% or more of the company.

Also, there are no RMDs for Roth IRAs during the account owner's lifetime. A spouse who inherits a Roth IRA can treat it as their own, also avoiding required dis-

tributions, but other heirs must begin to empty the account after it's inherited.

## CONSIDER ACCOUNT CONVERSIONS

Another way to avoid RMDs is by converting an IRA or other retirement account to a Roth, but doing so means paying taxes on the money now rather than later.

Conversions can make sense when you expect to be in a higher tax bracket in retirement and you can pay the tax without raiding your retirement savings, says certified financial planner Michael Kitces, publisher of financial planning strategy site Nerd's Eye View. Young people are often good candidates for conversions since their tax bracket likely will rise along with their earnings. Most people nearing retirement will be in the opposite situation — their tax bracket will drop once they stop working, so conversions may not be a good idea.

People who have been diligent savers, however, could find themselves pushed into a higher tax bracket once they're required to start making minimum withdrawals, Kitces says. In that case, Roth conversions before age 72 could be smart, but you'll want to consult with a tax pro. Converting too much could jack up your tax bill and, if you're on Medicare, potentially increase your premiums. □

## Biden admin reveals 60 finalists for \$1B in economic grants

By **JOSH BOAK**  
Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo on Monday announced 60 finalists for \$1 billion in economic development grants tied to the Biden administration's coronavirus relief package and aimed at improving job training and regional industry partnerships. There were 529 applicants for the grants. That means roughly 11% of

submissions made it to the next round, which will ultimately choose 20 to 30 regional coalitions for up to \$100 million in grants that could shape manufacturing, clean energy and life sciences hubs around the country. Twelve of the finalists were from places tied to the coal industry. The finalists were predominantly coalitions made up of government, academic and economic partnerships. They will receive

\$500,000 each to help plan for the next round, with applications due in March. The deadline for choosing the winners is September. Among the city-led finalists are: Indianapolis; Newark, New Jersey; Tucson, Arizona; Manchester, New Hampshire; Phoenix; and New Orleans. The finalists also include universities in Alabama, Maine, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Kansas. There are also economic part-



Wind turbines dwarf nearby buildings June 30, 2021, in Okarche, Okla.

Associated Press

nerships and industry-specific organizations such as the Wisconsin Paper Council. □



# CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

## ACROSS

- 1 Training book
- 7 Follow orders
- 11 Go by
- 12 Mountain lion
- 13 Made stricter, as security
- 15 Goof
- 16 Song sung singly
- 18 Physics amount
- 21 Patch up
- 22 Pollux's twin
- 24 Hoppy brew
- 25 Failure
- 26 Pitching stat
- 27 Team member
- 29 Look upon
- 30 Strike
- 31 Signing needs
- 32 General Powell
- 34 Became less serious
- 40 Fix text
- 41 Relaxed
- 42 Bassets and beagles
- 43 Rural worker

## DOWN

- 1 Got together
- 2 Boxing great
- 3 Pester
- 4 Supported
- 5 Texas player
- 6 Lusty look
- 7 Met shows
- 8 Unopened rose
- 9 Outback bird
- 10 Puppy sound
- 14 Wanderer
- 16 Vends
- 17 Basketball's Shaquille

Q	U	I	J	A	F	A	T	A	L
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K	N	O	B	S	Y	E	M	E	N
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A	D	O	P	T		P	I	X	I
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		R	E	C	L				
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C	O	R	A	L		S	P	L	A
H	A	I	T	I		S	E	E	T
E	D	G	E	S		O	R	G	A

Yesterday's answer

- 19 Beer mug
- 20 Tender spots
- 21 Travel aid
- 22 Nastly dog
- 23 Uncooked
- 25 Bus terminal
- 28 Marina boats
- 29 Furniture layer
- 31 Ship of
- 1492
- 33 Autumn dropper
- 34 Was a pioneer
- 35 Marrying words
- 36 Musician's job
- 37 River stopper
- 38 Take advantage of
- 39 For each

1	2	3	4	5	6		7	8	9	10
11							12			
13							14			
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			32		33					
34	35	36						37	38	39
40					41					
42					43					

12-14

AXYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-14

CRYPTOQUOTE

NXDL YSBOZULBYL GNXG ZO

ASE NXDL USBL X MZGGML

GNZBV QLMM, ASE YXB US X

IZVVF GNZBV QLMM, GSS,

— UXDZU PGSFLA

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WHAT YOU DON'T SEE WITH YOUR EYES, DON'T WITNESS WITH YOUR MOUTH. — YIDDISH PROVERB



Kenny Sanford exits his mother-in-law's apartment through a collapsed wall Saturday, Dec. 11, 2021, in Mayfield, Ky.

Associated Press

## EXPLAINER: Was tornado outbreak related to climate change?

By S. NAISHADHAM Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The calendar said December but the warm moist air screamed of springtime. Add an eastbound storm front guided by a La Nina weather pattern into that mismatch and it spawned tornadoes that killed dozens over five U.S. states. Tornadoes in December are unusual, but not unheard of. But the ferocity and path length of Friday night's tornadoes likely put them in a category of their own, meteorologists say. One of the twisters if it is confirmed to have been just one likely broke a nearly 100-year-old record for how long a tornado stayed on the ground in a path of destruction, experts said.

"One word: remarkable; unbelievable would be another," said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini. "It was really a late spring type of setup in the middle of De-

cember." Warm weather was a crucial ingredient in this tornado outbreak, but whether climate change is a factor is not quite as clear, meteorologists say. Scientists say figuring out how climate change is affecting the frequency of tornadoes is complicated and their understanding is still evolving. But they do say the atmospheric conditions that give rise to such outbreaks are intensifying in the winter as the planet warms. And tornado alley is shifting farther east away from the Kansas-Oklahoma area and into states where Friday's killers hit. Here's a look at what's known about Friday's tornado outbreak and the role of climate change in such weather events.

### WHAT CAUSES A TORNADO?

Tornadoes are whirling, vertical air columns that form from thunderstorms and stretch to the ground. They travel with ferocious speed and lay waste to every-

thing in their path. Thunderstorms occur when denser, drier cold air is pushed over warmer, humid air, conditions scientists call atmospheric instability. As that happens, an updraft is created when the warm air rises. When winds vary in speed or direction at different altitudes a condition known as wind shear the updraft will start to spin. These changes in winds produce the spin necessary for a tornado. For especially strong tornadoes, changes are needed in both the wind's speed and direction.

"When considerable variation in wind is found over the lowest few thousand feet of the atmosphere, tornado-producing 'supercell thunderstorms' are possible," said Paul Markowski, professor of meteorology at Pennsylvania State University. "That's what we had yesterday." There's usually a lot of wind shear in the winter because of the big difference in temperature and air pressure between the equator and the Arctic, Gensini said. But usually, there's not a lot of instability in the winter that's needed for tornadoes because the air isn't as warm and humid, Gensini said. This time there was. □

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# Review: Leo, JLaw are trying to warn us in 'Don't Look Up'

By **JOCELYN NOVECK**  
AP National Writer

You know you're in deep doodoo when that planet-destroying comet on a collision course with Earth isn't your biggest problem.

Your biggest problem: You're the scientist who discovered the darned thing but nobody has the patience or the bandwidth or the political will to believe it. And it's coming. In six months. That's a fact.

That the comet is a stand-in for climate change is hardly a secret going into "Don't Look Up," Adam McKay's exceedingly watchable, funny and star-studded yet somewhat chaotic satire. For one thing, its star is Leonardo DiCaprio, for whom climate change awareness is a passion.

What becomes clear soon enough is that the film is also about the pandemic, and vaccine resistance, and the tendency in American society for issues that have nothing to do with politics to become hopelessly political.

"Don't Look Up" sees McKay ("Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy" and "Talladega Nights") returning to comedy after turning to darker, political themes in "The Big Short," about the 2008 financial crisis, and "Vice," his Dick Cheney biopic.

As those last two films showed, McKay's filmmaking can be dazzling, brainy



This image released by Netflix shows Leonardo DiCaprio as Dr. Randall Mindy and Jennifer Lawrence as Kate Dibiasky in a scene from "Don't Look Up."

Associated Press

and so fast-moving that one had better not sneeze for even a moment. The material is less dense here — the utter simplicity of a comet headed toward Earth is the whole point, really — and nobody suddenly launches into iambic pentameter, as Christian Bale and Amy Adams memorably did in "Vice" (although come to think of it, there are actors here who'd be perfect — we have Meryl Streep and Mark Rylance, for heaven's sake).

But while I enjoyed the mix of humor and emotion (and outright terror) — there are laugh-out-loud moments and also deeply poignant

ones — some might find the tonal shifts a bit jarring. Perhaps a more valid nit to pick is that the the jampacked script doesn't quite do all these movie stars justice. And what a group McKay has assembled: DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Streep, Cate Blanchett, Rylance, Jonah Hill, Timothée Chalamet, Tyler Perry, among others. Not to mention Ariana Grande, who nails her performance of a hilarious theme song.

We begin at Michigan State University, where, in a terrific pre-credits sequence, astronomy grad student Kate Dibiasky (Lawrence, feisty and funny

and perfect), doing some telescope work one day, is stunned to realize she's discovered a comet.

But when her mentor, Prof. Randall Mindy (DiCaprio, toning down his charisma to portray a nerdy academic prone to panic attacks), does some calculations, he can't believe his eyes: The "planet killer" comet will hit Earth in six months.

Soon the pair are in touch with the Planetary Defense Coordination Office (a real thing), and flying to Washington to meet with the self-involved, inept and somewhat corrupt President Orlean (Streep, with 20-something hair and

pointy red glasses). In the Oval Office, nobody is too worried, least of all Orlean's insufferable son and chief of staff, Jason (an obnoxiously funny Hill, clearly improvising much of the time). Jason is particularly doubtful because Randall and Kate are not Ivy Leaguers: Watch JLaw offer to show her SAT scores.

As for POTUS, who's in the middle of a scandal with her Supreme Court nominee, she has one, impatient question: "OK, what's the ASK here?"

The only choice is to go to the media. That doesn't go too well either. On a popular morning show, The Daily Rip, the hosts (Tyler Perry and Cate Blanchett, having lots of fun) don't get the point either, and the message gets lost amid memes about Randall's nerdy attractiveness and Kate's on-air explosion ("We're all gonna die!" she screams.) Meanwhile, an attempted lifesaving mission onto the comet — a la "Armageddon" — encounters its own problems. And then tech billionaire Peter Isherwall gets involved. Rylance, masterful at playing strange types, has perhaps never looked or sounded quite this weird, with his perfect hair and too-white teeth. Through this not-quite-developed character, McKay conveys his obvious disdain for the billionaires currently cavorting in space. □



This photo provided by Time magazine shows Elon Musk on the cover of the magazine's Dec. 27 - Jan 3 double issue announcing Musk as their 2021 "Person of the Year."

Associated Press

## Time magazine's "Person of the Year" is Elon Musk

The Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Calling him a "clown, genius, edgelord, visionary, industrialist, showman," Time magazine has named Tesla CEO Elon Musk as its Person of the Year for 2021.

Musk, who is also the founder and CEO space exploration company SpaceX, recently passed Amazon founder Jeff Bezos as the world's wealthiest person as the rising price of Tesla pushing his net worth to around \$300 billion. Time cited the breadth of Musk's endeavors, from his founding of SpaceX in 2002, to his

hand in the creation of the alternative energy company SolarCity in addition to Tesla, the most valuable car company in the world. The magazine also noted the sway Musk holds over an army of loyal followers (and investors) on social media, where he skewers the powerful and also regulators attempting to keep in check an executive that is far from traditional. Before his 66 million followers on Twitter, he offers outlandish assistance to the world and drives even his own followers and investors mad by roiling markets.

Though it only became profitable in recent years, Tesla is far and away the world's most valuable car company, at one point this year crossing the \$1 trillion market capitalization threshold. Detroit heavyweights Ford and General Motors are worth less than \$200 billion combined.

NASA has contracted with SpaceX to use Starship for delivering astronauts to the lunar surface as early as 2025. Musk said he plans to use the reusable ships to eventually land people on Mars.

Musk, a prolific tweeter,

has used the social media platform to challenge government regulators and politicians, offers outlandish assistance to the world and drives even his own investors mad by roiling markets. Time highlighted Musk's recent admission to his 66 million Twitter followers that half his tweets were "made on a porcelain throne." In its profile of the provocative CEO, Time went on to chronicle one of those toilet tweet storms in detail before concluding: "This is the man who aspires to save our planet and get us a new one to inhabit." □





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## Analysis: Bad NFL teams getting blown out is a common theme

By **ROB MAADDI**

**AP Pro Football Writer**

**TAMPA, Fla. (AP)** — Josh Allen wouldn't let Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers cruise to a lopsided victory after the Buffalo Bills fell behind by 21 points at halftime.

Allen led an impressive comeback with his arm and legs to force overtime before Brady connected with Breshad Perriman for a 58-yard catch-and-run touchdown to win it.

Several other teams didn't show Buffalo's fight on Sunday. Most had less at stake. Seven games were decided by 15 or more points, including five by at least 20. Considering the teams on the losing end, it wasn't a surprise.

The Lions (1-11-1), Jaguars (2-11), Texans (2-11), Jets (3-10) and Giants (4-9) were outscored 158-53. They'll spend the final four weeks fighting for draft positioning, and on the wrong side of more routs.

"It's going to flip," Jets coach Robert Saleh promised after a 30-9 loss to New Orleans. "This crappy part is part of the process, but at the same time it's not discouraging by any sense of the imagination because we've got a lot of young guys getting a lot of good playing time. And I promise you they're learning from all this." Jets fans can't be blamed for being skeptical. New York will miss the playoffs for the 11th straight year and has had only one winning season in that span. Coming off its first win of the season, Detroit stayed close for a half in Denver. The Broncos then pulled away for a 38-10 win. They've been saying the same thing for decades in Detroit. The Lions haven't won a playoff game since 1992.

The dysfunctional Jaguars lost 20-0 at Tennessee following a report that rookie coach Urban Meyer and his staff aren't getting



**Jacksonville Jaguars quarterback Trevor Lawrence (16) throws an interception to Tennessee Titans cornerback Kristian Fulton (26) during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 12, 2021, in Nashville, Tenn.**

**Associated Press**

along. Jacksonville has just one winning season in the last 14 years yet has suffered more embarrassment under Meyer in only 13 games.

"It hasn't exactly materialized the way I expected it to have, the experience of winning games," said Meyer, a three-time national champion at Florida and Ohio State who has

learned it's not easy to win in the NFL.

The Texans fell to the Seahawks 33-13, their 23rd loss in 29 games. They couldn't win with Deshaun Watson last year. They can't win with him getting paid to sit out games this season.

Houston visits Jacksonville next week. The winner may be the real loser for dropping a spot in the draft or-

der.

The Giants are one loss away from securing their fifth straight losing season and eighth in nine years after a 37-21 loss to the Chargers. The biggest question in New York will be coach Joe Judge's job security after only two seasons.

"I am the head coach and everything in this program reflects on me," Judge said. "I will never shy away from that. I do not make any excuses and I do not hide from that either. I am not a finger pointer. I am not an excuse maker and I am never trying to deflect anything. In terms of the direction the program is going, there is a lot of things that I see week after week with our players and where we are going that I am encouraging all the way. Sometimes that is tough to see externally, but these are the key foundational pieces that are being put in place and we are making lots of progress going forward." □



# On road to 5th Olympics, White finds the risk is worth it

By EDDIE PELLIS

AP National Writer

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo.

(AP) — One of Shaun White's greatest fears is finding himself upside-down above a halfpipe with no idea where he's going to land.

Time and again over two decades, he has decided the risk is worth it.

As he embarked this month on the quest to make his fifth Olympics, the world's most famous halfpipe rider says living a life full of calculated risks is still part of his DNA — a mindset that, these days, is less taken for granted in all-or-nothing sports such as his than it was a mere 12 months ago. "I've been lost in the air before, and it's terrifying," White said in an interview with The Associated Press. "You're flying around and you don't know where you are and you're hoping for the best. The sky color matches the color of the snow. We never really had a name for that. I was intrigued when I heard they call it the 'twisties' in gymnastics."

Simone Biles' decision to pull out of the women's team final at the Tokyo Games earlier this year resonated with athletes throughout the world, including White, and advanced the conversation about many of the mental health challenges Olympians face.

Just as twisting and somersaulting over a vault can be a life-threatening endeavor, doing the same over an icy, rock-hard halfpipe is among the most dangerous of Olympic pursuits. White was famously helicoptered off the halfpipe in New Zealand after a grisly wreck in the run-up to the 2018 Olympics. When he overcame the 62-stitch injury to his face and won the gold medal in Pyeongchang, it marked a stunning crescendo to a comeback that even he wasn't sure was possible.

White believes the key to an athlete putting him or herself at risk over and over again is knowing you're doing it for the right reasons — a key component missing



Shaun White, of United States, makes a run in the halfpipe finals, Saturday, Dec. 11, 2021, during the U.S. Grand Prix snowboarding event at Copper Mountain, Colo.

Associated Press

from Biles' mindset when she stepped away.

"It's scary to be out there alone," White said. "And when you go out and do that, you want it to be your choice. You don't want to feel like you have to do this because of some reason other than, 'Hey, I want to do this.'"

The stakes will be every bit as high, if not higher, this year. A triple cork jump — involving 1620 degrees of spin above the halfpipe — could very well be the trick needed to win the Olympics. It involves another half-revolution of spin than the back-to-back 1440s that White used to win in South Korea. White used to practice the triple cork into an air bag, but nobody has yet pulled it off in a high-stakes contest.

Meanwhile, at the season's first Olympic qualifying event this week, everyone saw the risks involved. In Saturday's final of the U.S. Grand Prix, Japanese rider Raibu Katayama had to be taken by sled off the course after hitting his head and neck on the lip of the halfpipe.

Earlier in the week, freeskier

Connor Ladd was taken to a hospital in Denver after suffering a traumatic head injury. His family said Ladd has made progress but has a long journey ahead.

Another freeskier, Gus Kenworthy, pulled out of the contest. He said it's not uncommon for action-sport athletes to get lost in the air.

"I didn't have a sense of where the sky and the ground and everything was, and that's why I pulled out," said Kenworthy, who won the silver medal in slopestyle in 2014.

White withdrew from snowboarding's Olympic slopestyle contest in 2014 — part of a Russian adventure that turned out nothing like he'd hoped.

"It was hard and it was harsh," White said. "I got a bunch of backlash from other competitors saying I chickened out. But I had to be confident with myself and say, 'You know, look, this is the comfort level, and it's not there.'"

White also finished fourth in the halfpipe that year. The setbacks forced him to step back and rethink what made him love snow-

boarding, and all the risk that comes with it, in the first place.

Part of the mission between 2014-18 was to get back to the top, and do it without so much noise from the outside — sponsors, business projects and the like.

It's like that again this time around but with an even tighter-knit feel.

He's working with his brother, Jesse, again, and is in a relationship with actress Nina Dobrev, whom he met at a motivational seminar. Now 35 and with the end of his career much closer than the beginning, White says he's entering this Olympic journey with a refined perspective on what's really important.

In his teens and 20s, he battled against cynics who wondered why he was devoting his life — putting his life on the line, in fact — for a sport that was not accepted in the mainstream. He coupled that with a desire to show that not only was he in a legit sport, but that he was the best at it, and that, yes, you could become rich and famous doing it.

"After a while, drawing from

that same fuel of motivation isn't sustainable," he said. "So then, you go, 'OK, cool, what else is there?' And then I look and see things that are important to me: Being a good friend. Being someone who others can count on. I had to take this hard look at what I was doing, and now, this understanding of who I am in the greater picture has really helped me with everything. With feeling content."

Don't get him wrong. He'd still like to win on Feb. 11, the day the gold medal is awarded on the mountains outside of Beijing.

If he does, it will add to an already legendary trophy case. If he doesn't — well, it won't be the first time he's come up short.

Perhaps the biggest triumph, he says, has already been secured. He's still doing this at age 35, and he's ready to give everything in a quest for a fifth Olympics because he's doing it for the right reasons.

"I'm feeling motivated and I'm feeling like I can," White said. "It's a different feeling but the drive and the motivation is there." □